

MR. POWDERLY'S POLICY.

SOME OF HIS RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

The Workingman in Politics—Suggestion for a One Plank Platform—What the Success of the Farmers Means—A Railway Federation—New York Notes.

The general assembly of the Knights of Labor, which met in Denver recently, did nothing of importance, unless the election of officers can be so classed. Mr. Powderly was quoted as saying before the convention assembled that "the most important business will be the election of officers." It is certainly not an encouraging state of affairs when the annual meeting of this once great organization, whose aims have been so high, can find nothing to do of more consequence than the distribution of the positions which pay. And I hope I will not be deemed unnaturally prejudiced when I say that the convention did poorly in disposing of this one "important" matter. The Knights of Labor has long needed new blood at the head, and it was hoped that Mr. Powderly and his official associates of the past four or five years would realize this, and for the sake of the order be willing to stand aside. But the hope has proved a forlorn one.

As I said some time ago in this correspondence, when an organization becomes known as the property of one man its days of usefulness are over; and the Denver convention showed beyond all doubt that the Knights of Labor is the property of Mr. T. V. Powderly. For three years he has made the programmes, and they have been carried out. It is true there has been opposition, but it has not been of sufficient strength to break the grip of Mr. Powderly. What the results of this one man power have been is clear to all. The order has fallen to less than 200,000 members. The statement that the G. M. W. and his associates were re-elected as an appreciation of their excellent administration of the order's finances during the past year is buncombe. The deficit of \$13,000 a year ago and the surplus of \$18,000 at present proves nothing. The same master hand has been at the helm since long before the deficit was reported. And it is said that the present surplus is due to money advanced by District Assembly No. 84.

The general assembly, at the suggestion of the G. M. W., discontinued the co-operative board. This board had been in existence since 1884, and its discontinuance is an admission that the order as a promoter of co-operation has been a dismal failure. The members of the board have not been altogether to blame for this failure; they have been handicapped by the general officers. It was said at Denver that the board was not needed, as everything relating to co-operation had to come before the executive board anyhow. There is where the trouble has been. The money squandered by the general officers in 1886-87—something like a quarter of a million—if put into co-operative enterprises, would have done the order inestimable good and have put it in possession of something more substantial to build upon than a mere name and the fame of one man.

There is no sense in the great gusto which has followed the recommendation of Mr. Powderly that assemblies discuss the tariff question. The suggestion is only an echo of what has been heard in the unions and assemblies for years. If on this and other economic questions he has intelligent opinions—knows which side he is on—why does he not come out flat-footed and announce his principles and labor for their adoption by his followers? The Knights of Labor has long enough been gnawing bare bones; it is

time it had one with a little meat on it.

And what will the Knights do with the question of politics, which has been a subject for circulars, long articles in the official organ and general expressions of opinion for two or three months? Mr. Powderly has heretofore opposed an out and out independent labor political movement. He has rather preferred the old method of "picking out of the nominees of the regular parties the best men for support." This meant the same old fight over persons and nothing done for principle. Men differ in their judgment of men, and so brothers in the same assembly support opposing candidates, each believing himself to be right, or taking advantage of the absence of a policy to feather his nest by bartering his "influence." The cry of the reform movement has always been, "Measures, not men;" but Mr. Powderly has ever advised action on the opposite line. It is not sufficient to say that the men whose views and characters are commendable are to be supported. What is wanted is a platform with men on it, and not men with a platform.

The wonderful success of the farmers' movement in the late elections shows what can be done by a clean cut policy. Long years had the farmers tried the other scheme, only to be betrayed after their votes were cast. They were never reckoned as of any importance as a class. From now on they will be considered by the lawmakers, and so long as they maintain a separate political organization and fight for its principles they will be factors in the administration of a country of which they comprise so vast and important a part.

The general assembly decided to make an effort to get together a national conference of industrial reformers as soon as possible, and to invite the Farmers' Alliance and all labor organizations to participate therein. Had such a step been taken four years ago, when the Knights of Labor was the leading organization of the country, great good would probably have been accomplished. It does not today occupy that pre-eminent position; but it is to be hoped that the proposed conference will be held and something practicable done. However, there are rocks in the way which must be avoided.

I have for several years thought it possible to unite the agricultural workers and mechanics in a political movement. It is more possible today than ever before. The prejudices which the farmers so long held against the organized city workers are fast giving way to an understanding that the interests of the two are identical. Now, what is needed is a union movement. In The Labor Enquirer, in 1887-88, I advocated an amalgamation of all the independent political forces upon a one plank platform. When federation has heretofore been attempted it was found that each faction had a truck load of planks to put into the platform, and, for the sake of harmony, they were all dumped in. As a result there was at least one peg upon which every man could hang an objection, and so the voters went back to the old parties.

What is wanted is a central idea that every faction can indorse. This should be made the platform and everything else held in abeyance for the time being. I believed three years ago, and I believe now, that the nationalization of railways and telegraphs is that idea. It is found in the declarations of every one of the independent movements; it can be defended against any assault of the powers that be, and it is indorsed today by more than one-half of the voters in the United States. Here's your oyster: will you open it?

Another need of the hour, which Mr. Powderly called attention to in his annual address, is a complete federation of

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railwaymen's organizations for defensive purposes. But the chief obstacle in the way of this step is the grip P. M. Arthur has on the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. So long as he has sufficient influence to remain at the head of that organization so long will it be impossible to secure the co-operation of the engineers. And Mr. Arthur is tenacious, he likes to be chief. It is music in his ears to hear "Arthur's organization" spoken of. Does Mr. Powderly object to the ambition? If he does he should set Arthur a better example.

Some amusement was caused recently by an article in The New York Tribune. It was in relation to the proceedings brought by the Mergenthaler Typesetting Machine company against the Rogers Linotype company for infringement of patents. The Tribune stated that the Mergenthaler machines were brought to notice by their introduction into that office. In another sentence the article said: "The Mergenthaler company favors the employment of union printers." Hence the smile of the knowing ones. The Tribune defends the Mergenthaler and fights the union.

By the way, the unpleasantness between Typographical Union No. 6 (English) and Typographical No. 7 (German), both of New York, over the control of The Journal office, where members of each organization were employed, seems to get farther from settlement all the time. Considerable feeling has been shown by both sides to the controversy, but No. 7 certainly went too far when it issued a boycott against The Journal and printed an advertisement for English printers to join a union in opposition to No. 6.

Charles Guy Brown has retired from the management of The Union Printer, the Concord Co-operative Printing company, which has always done the mechanical work on the paper, succeeding him. Several causes are assigned for the change, but the knowing ones say the real objection to Mr. Brown was that he allowed too much political matter to get into the columns of The Union Printer during the recent campaign. Be this as it may, the paper under his management was a good one from a journalistic standpoint, and was without a superior as a chronicler of trade news. May his successors do as well in these particulars!

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